

with it. Middle-class Americans remember the consequences of the Republicans' willingness to threaten a national default. I am relieved that this time Congress was able to reach a compromise and avert a fight so middle-class families can get the certainty they badly need.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

ENSURING THE COMPLETE AND TIMELY PAYMENT OF THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 325, which the clerk will report by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 325) to ensure the complete and timely payment of the obligations of the United States Government until May 19, 2013, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and that the time in quorum call be equally divided.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, thanks in part to filmmaker Steven Spielberg, there is renewed interest today in America's 16th President, Abraham Lincoln.

A century and a half ago, during one of the most critical times in American history, Lincoln faced a nation divided by ideology and war. Only through fierce determination and moral courage was Lincoln able to preserve the Union.

Today, we again are in an ideological divide. Too often, Congress fails to agree on key social and economic issues.

Politics is winning out over progress. Like the America of the 1860s, the unwillingness to compromise has crippled our ability to move forward as a nation.

As we discuss America's fiscal responsibility today, I would like to share the words of Lincoln. One of my favorite quotes is this: "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."

As a nation we have a responsibility to fulfill existing commitments to pay our bills, and it is a responsibility we

cannot evade. As we know, the Federal Government officially hit its current authorizing spending limit—also known as the debt ceiling—on December 31, 2012.

Over the past month, the Treasury Secretary has been using extraordinary measures to continue funding the government and sending out Social Security checks and veterans' benefits. Treasury's action only bought limited time. The debt limit deadline was moved from December 31 to mid-February or early March. Needless to say, a feeling of uncertainty has spread across the country. However, on January 23, the House of Representatives approved a plan to ensure America can meet our obligations through May 18.

The bill, H.R. 325, which we have before us today, also provides an incentive for action on the Federal budget. The legislation includes a provision that would withhold the pay of lawmakers in the House or the Senate if their Chamber fails to pass the budget blueprint by April 15.

Since 1917, Congress has always taken appropriate action to avoid defaulting on America's bills. We must continue to fulfill our responsibility. We must not fail now. There is too much at stake.

Failure to pass this bill will set off an unpredictable financial calamity that would plunge not only the United States but much of the world back into recession and more. Every single American would feel the economic impact. There would be radical cuts in military salaries, veterans' programs, Social Security benefits, and education. Tax refunds may not be issued, and our country's credit rating would almost certainly be downgraded significantly.

I understand the concern over America's deficits and debt. I share those concerns, and I strongly believe we must develop a long-term plan to cut the debt and get America's fiscal house in order.

Let me remind you, over the past 2 years we have made real progress at cutting deficits and debt. We have done so working together across the aisle.

In 2011, we passed \$1.4 trillion in spending cuts. Earlier this month, Congress passed legislation that reduced the deficit by another \$600 billion. Together, with interest savings, these two actions will cut the deficit by about \$2.5 trillion over the next 10 years.

Add to this the savings from winding down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the savings to America's Federal budget reach almost \$3.5 trillion over 10 years—all together \$3.5 trillion over 10 years—which we already are doing as a consequence of winding down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That is real progress.

In the coming weeks we will have to confront the deficit issue again when sequestration of spending programs starts on March 1. March 27, the day the continuing resolution for appropriations expires, brings tough choices. That is why we are here, to make the tough decisions, to do the hard work.

The threat of defaulting on our fiscal obligations is extremely dangerous. It puts America on unstable ground. We all are aware how our political brinkmanship of 2011 led to the first ever downgrade of our country's credit rating. It sent shock waves in stock markets across the globe and nearly crashed the American economy.

We have the opportunity today to avoid that calamity. We have the opportunity today to avoid another destructive budget battle. H.R. 325 ensures America can meet our obligations through May 18 and provides the Congress with a necessary calm between fiscal storms.

The House of Representatives adopted the bill by a bipartisan vote, 285 to 144, and it is supported by the administration. The bill before us is necessary to remove the threat of default that would throw the U.S. economy into chaos. It gives us time to work together on a sensible, balanced solution to our Nation's fiscal challenges without undermining the Nation's economy. It deserves our support.

I congratulate Speaker BOEHNER on his leadership with regard to this issue and the House for its bipartisan approach to a tough but necessary vote. Let's pass this legislation today and move on to the debate over what further deficit reduction options we need to help keep America's economy moving forward.

In the words of Lincoln: "The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion."

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, right now the Federal deficit stands at roughly \$16.4 trillion. I don't know how anyone can hear that number and not be appalled, nor do I believe there will be, over 10 years, \$2.5 trillion in deficit reduction. In fact, I don't see any deficit reduction except, perhaps, bringing our soldiers back, but that is not particularly deficit reduction since it looks as though we are going to have difficulty maintaining the military with the strength it has had in the past.

Think about it, \$16.4 trillion. It is incredible. The Federal Government is currently operating with just \$25 million of so-called headroom underneath a statutory debt limit which, to be more precise, is \$16.394 trillion. We are told that we reached the debt ceiling at the beginning of the year, and in order for the government to pay for obligations without further borrowing, Treasury has been using so-called "extraordinary measures," such as changing the finances of certain Federal savings plans.

Sadly, the use of such measures has become the norm under this administration and under this Senate majority, where budget and debt decisions are continually made through last-minute, closed-door deals. I don't think the American people can stomach another cliff scenario. I don't think they